



TOPIC: ENGINEERING, CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT, PEOPLE & ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE

# IMPLEMENTING A SUCCESSFUL SAFETY PROGRAM IN A BREWERY

🕒 9 min read

Installing an effective safety culture in a new brewery or an existing brewery with a less than satisfactory safety record is a very challenging undertaking. Breweries are places where risk-takers congregate and adventurous-types gather for refreshment. It can be as easy to find safety hazards in breweries as it is to find delicious beverages. A brewery is not a “dangerous” place, but there are many hazards present – slippery surfaces, tripping hazards, boiling liquids, sharp objects, fast-moving equipment with hard edges, pinching-hazards, machines that can crush things, and various other chemical and electrical risks to name just a few. There are brewery specific threats as well, such as CO<sub>2</sub> asphyxiation risks and confined space entry. If employees are not well-trained, careful and vigilant, they can put themselves and others at risk of serious injury or worse. A brewery culture that embraces and values safety above all else is an important part of the success story of that brewery.

**Why Safety matters to everyone**

The answer is obvious, but it often gets lost in the day-to-day shuffle of work and life. People rush from one task to another to “get things done” to move on and tackle the next project. If they don’t stop to consider the safety protocol inherent to each job, they will likely put themselves and others at risk. The answer to why safety matters is not just the reward of not getting oneself hurt, but also the satisfaction that others are not at risk of injury as well. Any injury takes a toll on the injured party as well as any others who are involved – whether that be on the side of causing the incident or merely witnessing it or the aftermath. Any catastrophic incident leaves scars on all individuals involved. Injury avoidance is therefore critical in any workplace culture to make sure that all employees go home in the same healthy state that they came in to work.

### **Safety, Quality, Efficiency – in that order**

In a successful workplace culture Safety must take precedence over both quality and efficiency so that all employees feel empowered to make the right personal and professional decisions in regards to their own individual health and safety on the job as well as elsewhere in their lives. All employees need to understand and believe that they are valued as humans and their well-being is the primary goal of the organization. This is paramount. Quality is a close second, but employees need to be re-assured every day that the quality of their health and safety matters more than the quality of the product being produced. When all employees believe and live this culture, the quality and the efficiency of the operation will follow – this is commitment to the cause. The simple statement “There is no task that is so important that it cannot be done safely” may be a double-negative, but it is a powerful tool to empower all employees to develop a mindset of Safety above all else.

### **Individual Accountability – Preparation, Awareness, Focus**

The same culture that empowers employees to make safety decisions on a daily basis also drives accountability within the organization. Personal safety can be laid out simply in a three-step process of accountability that can be easily communicated to all employees.

- Step one is Preparation – the act of preparing oneself for each and every task.
- Step two is Awareness – the active consciousness and assessment of all risks.
- Step three is Focus – always maintaining the constant awareness of all risks.

Preparation for any job from a safety focus involves understanding the inherent risks and safeguarding oneself against those risks. This involves knowing Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) requirements, having the PPE in good condition, and using it appropriately; it also involves understanding and following Lock-Out / Tag-Out (LOTO) procedures and following them. Preparation is as much about knowing the procedure as it is following it. It also means showing up to work ready to work – with an attitude that no-one is going to get hurt – ever.

Awareness and Focus may sound like they are the same thing, but they are not. Awareness is about knowing and understanding the risks and procedures and being cognizant that certain risks will be inherent to the job at hand. Boiling liquids can burn, forklifts can crush, conveyors can pinch, and electrical hazards can shock us. Awareness of these facts is only half the battle.

Focus is about constantly being aware. Humans lose focus when they rush through tasks or are distracted. To avoid the loss of focus, employees need to minimize distractions while on the job and retain the vigilant awareness inherent in managing a process with multiple risks. This means avoiding the obvious distractions of phones and other interfering devices while moving about the brewery (or any workspace) and performing their duties.

Kayla Johnson, Senior Advisor, Engineering Services at First Key says, “Employees learn by example. If they don’t see you practicing good safety habits, they won’t think safety is a priority”.

### **Organizational Accountability – Embedding the Safety Culture**

The development of a high functioning Safety Culture requires embedding accountability at all levels of the organization. It starts with design and workflow, continues through training of employees, and remains intrinsic to the operation of the facility when every employee understands and follows all safety rules as a result of believing in the reasons that the rules exist. For this culture to work on all levels the clear desire to make the work environment safe for all employees needs to be designed into every piece of equipment and every procedure from the beginning. The false bravado inherent in stories about carrying heavy objects up shaky ladders to drop ingredients into violently-boiling kettles or active fermentations spewing foam and CO<sub>2</sub> is not a badge of honor to be bragged about – it is an engineering problem to be solved before putting any actual people at risk.

Accountability starts with making sensible and well-intentioned rules that employees willfully follow because they are easy to understand and implement. The long-term benefit of wearing ear-plugs in loud areas may not be immediately apparent, but it is easy enough to understand that repetitive exposure to loud noises will have a deleterious impact on one’s hearing. To make the rule sensible though, it is best not to require ear-plugs in all areas – only in those areas where noise is above a certain designated decibel level. When the organization designs the rules with ease of use and ease of understanding in mind the employees are much more likely to respect the rules by meeting their needs and taking their individual safety seriously.

Safety training is an important aspect of employee training for all new employees – it needs to begin on day one and needs to continue throughout one’s employment. All employees should spend the first hour (or more) of their first day in an orientation that explains and demonstrates the importance of safety at the brewery. This should include a tour of the brewery with an explanation of all the basic risks that they may encounter in their new workplace. It is never safe to assume that a person who has never been in a brewery before will know all the risks that are immediately present when encountering hot liquids, beer under pressure, or cleaning chemicals among all the other hazardous situations that exist in a brewery. Even new employees who have experience in other breweries may not be aware of the nuances of risk that may exist in their new environs. Safety training begins on day one for everyone, and needs to continue throughout their career with refresher training as well as training on any new equipment or new tasks. Every new task, each new piece of equipment and every job that every employee does needs to begin with more safety training. If there is a new piece of hop-dosing equipment, the first question every employee should be asking is “how do we operate it safely?”

Safety rules are inherently important; celebrations are equally important. Every month without an injury needs to be celebrated. It is a way of building momentum and keeping score. Whether that is rewarded with Safety Beer or Safety Donuts, it needs to be celebrated. Nobody got hurt, Yay! Let's eat some donuts and drink some beer and then come back next month and do it again. Building momentum is an important way to continue the success and should not be overlooked.

### **Increase Awareness – Safety is part of every discussion, every meeting**

Increasing the visibility of safety initiatives will help to embed the safety culture into the organization organically. Beginning every meeting with Safety may sound like a cliché, however it works well to reinforce the importance of safety within the entire team. If a new sales team member is not trained on lifting techniques and attempts to move a keg in an unsafe manner the unfortunate result is felt beyond the aching back of that individual – it is a failure of the system of training.

Everyone on the brewery team is part of the Safety Team and all of them should come to work prepared to work safely. The involvement of the whole team in safety initiatives, safety training, safety meetings, and safety celebrations will continually foster community and teamwork that goes well beyond the simple goal of nobody getting hurt. Quality and efficiency will naturally follow this progression. Proactive safety meetings are the vehicle to improve safety awareness, and the actions of employees who are truly empowered to improve the safety of their work environment will be the proof of success. When an employee is observed cleaning up a slippery surface, picking up a piece of broken glass or filing down a sharp surface it will be clear that the empowerment has paid off.

### **Increase Focus to Improve Results**

The tangible results of taking an organization where people are constantly getting injured to one where nobody ever gets hurt may take time to unfold, but the results will come with the right attitude. Empowering all employees to make well-informed safety decisions is important, it is however very important to have someone in charge of the program. Everyone is responsible for their own personal safety, but one person needs to oversee the safety program – this includes setting and enforcing the rules, and following up and resolving all safety issues. This person needs to have the power and authority to get these things done and therefore needs to be a part of the management team. This is critical to the success of the program. This role also needs to track progress, the setbacks, the highlights and the lowlights. They also need to be involved in investigating every incident, every injury, even the near-misses. When an organization is tracking and preventing near-misses it is a truly proactive safety culture.

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